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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ NOV LIMA 5635  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 0825  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6291  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2017  
TAGS: [PMARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: MONTES DE MARIA: MILITARY-CIVILIAN COOPERATION  
HITS THE FARC

REF: A. BOGOTA 311

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 6460

[1](#)C. BOGOTA 7453

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer  
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) On October 24, the military attacked the FARC 37th Front, killing its commander alias "Martin Caballero." Caballero was the second front commander on the GOC's "most wanted" list to be killed by the military since September. The Caballero operation capped a year of joint military and law enforcement efforts in the Montes de Maria region of northern Colombia, pushing back FARC and other criminal groups which have long terrorized the area. Local commanders said local residents' active cooperation -- the product of improved security, respect for human rights, greater state presence, and economic development initiatives -- was key to military success. Still, they said the region's future prospects would depend on continued GOC efforts to deliver public services and promote economic progress -- what commanders called "the best long-term tools against against terrorism." End Summary.

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Death of a Terrorist Leader  
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[1](#)2. (U) On October 24, the Colombian military successfully struck the FARC's 37th Front, killing its commander Gustavo Rueda, aka "Martin Caballero." A 25-year FARC veteran, Caballero was acting head of the Caribbean Bloc. During Caballero's 16 years in command, the 37th Front terrorized inhabitants of the Montes de Maria (Sucre/Bolivar), engaging in assassinations, kidnapping, and extortion. The Front also killed scores of military and police, and laid extensive mine fields. Caballero's death weakens the FARC on the Caribbean Coast, where he had also absorbed command of the FARC's 35th Front. Caballero was wanted in the United States for the kidnapping of three U.S. citizens. He also plotted to kill President Clinton on a 2000 visit to Cartagena, and was responsible for the kidnapping of Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo. A January 1 assault on Caballero's camp by Marines and Special Forces enabled Araujo to flee (ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) The Caballero mission was a high priority for

President Uribe, and local Marine officer LTC Zea told us the president called almost every week to push for progress. In early 2007, the Marines received support from the newly formed Joint Decisive Action Force (FUCAD) -- three Army mobile brigades with dedicated Air Force assets for close air support. The operation that killed Caballero combined Special Forces ground fire, Air Force aerial attacks with Super Tucanos, and a land assault by the Marines and FUCAD. With Caballero's death, the GOC has killed three front commanders so far in 2007 (refs B, C). The Joint Special Operations Command (JOEC), which is responsible for high value targets (HVTs), had listed Caballero as one of its thirteen "most wanted."

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#### Military-Law Enforcement Collaboration Produces Security Gains

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¶4. (C) Law enforcement agencies also played a key role in undermining the FARC and other terrorist groups in the region and in laying the groundwork for the Caballero operation. The National Police arrested FARC militia members, generated intelligence, and helped ensure prompt investigations of human rights allegations. Police and Prosecutor General (Fiscalia) personnel were integrated with the military in combat operations, allowing for quick investigation of combat deaths. Sharp drops in FARC activity reflect these successes. In 2007, there has been one FARC roadblock compared with 32 in 2001, one kidnapping as opposed to 49 in 2002, and 11 homicides versus 67 in 2001. The Marines estimate the 37th Front has fallen from 248 to 104 fighters this year while the 35th Front dropped from 157 fighters to ¶131. Local ELN fronts have experienced a similar decline, going from an estimated 66 members to 17. The 49-member

Popular Revolutionary Army demobilized completely in 2007.

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#### Winning with Human Rights and Security

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¶5. (U) The Navy and Marines in the Montes region told us the local population was their main ally in the war against the FARC. Local residents were sick of FARC crimes, especially their indiscriminate use of landmines. Still, respect for human rights, establishment of effective civilian institutions, and economic development were key to winning active popular support. Local commanders demonstrated their situational-based human rights training, with a dedicated training ground, that all troops must receive prior to combat deployment. Training includes instructions on respecting civilian and prisoner rights, as well as procedures for working with the Fiscalia to investigate combat deaths. Commanders said local residents were natural allies if treated with respect.

¶6. (U) LTC Zea said the region's long-term prospects will depend on economic development. Commenting on the region's agricultural potential, he noted that "the region is rich, but terrorism has kept it poor." The improved local security situation has created an opportunity for new investment and economic activity. Zea said civilian institutions, such as Accion Integral and the interagency Centro de Coordinacion de Accion Integral (CCAI), are starting programs to expand state presence and foster development -- "the best long-term tools to beat terrorists."

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